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ABSTRACT

As more women pursue professional careers, studies that examine the role of work in the development of women's identity are needed. To explore the developmental issues of women administrators in higher education, selected data were examined from a comprehensive study of 270 women in educational administration. Interviews related to career development issues were conducted with 25 women administrators in higher education in Indiana. Results from the 24 interviews which had been transcribed and rated revealed that, although no one career pattern could be identified among the women, careers played a very important role in their lives. The establishment and maintenance of careers were influenced by both internal and external factors. One striking characteristic of the women interviewed was their lack of clear career goals. An examination of differences related to age and to family status revealed that younger women and women who had never married were more likely to exhibit continuous work patterns and to have worked totally in higher education settings while married women, especially those with children, were more likely to have had discontinuous work patterns, greater role strain, careers influenced by their husbands' career decisions, and more varied work histories than did single women. The findings suggest that life stages can be identified within the careers of professional women and that these stages seem to be related more to internal processes than to external roles. (NRB)

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The Career Development Issues Facing Women in Student Affairs Administration

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The Career Development Issues Facing Women in Student Affairs Administration

Few empirical studies have been conducted concerning the development of adult women over the lifespan. As values change regarding the role of women in society and increasing numbers of women are pursuing professional careers, studies that examine the role that work plays in the development of women's identity are clearly needed. Conflicts resulting from increased role options for women have been well documented (Bernard, 1975; Voyandoff, 1980). Zytowski (1969) suggested that the pattern of career development for women is determined jointly by women's motivation, by external factors such as environment and situation, and by internal factors such as ability. Several writers have explored the status and concerns of professional women (Theodore, 1971; Ashburn, 1977; Johnson & Johnson, 1976) and women in academic positions (Rossi & Calderwood, 1973; Broshart, 1978). However, most of these studies have focused on external conditions or socialization factors that impede the advancement of women in the professions. Little is actually known about the psychological development of women who pursue careers in nontraditional fields. The developmental issues of women administrators, in particular, remain largely unexplored (Moore, 1979). Examination of these issues can provide useful information to women presently engaged in, or contemplating, administrative careers as well as increasing our knowledge of women's development.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the results of a study designed, in part, to examine the career development of women in higher education administration. The following questions will be addressed: (a) Can predictable life stages be identified within the careers of professional women? (b) To what extent do these life stages involve external roles as opposed to internal processes? (c) To what extent is women's career development influenced by external, sociological factors (e.g. marital status, parental expectations) as opposed to internal psychological factors (e.g. achievement motivation, self-esteem)? (d) What changes take place with regard to the importance of career over the course of these women's lives?

Method

The data reported here were obtained as part of a more comprehensive study of developmental issues in the lives of women in educational administration. For the purposes of this paper only data obtained from higher education administrators related to their career development will be examined.

The names of women administrators in higher education in the state of Indiana were obtained from the membership rosters of three major professional associations: the American College Personnel Association, the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors, and the American Association of Higher Education. These women were sent a letter explaining the study and a brief questionnaire to return if they were interested

in participating. This questionnaire asked for biographical information with which to stratify an interview sample. Fifty women were selected for the study based on family status (never married, divorced or separated, married with children, married with no children) and age (20 - 29, 30 - 39, 40 - 49, 50 - 59, 60 or older). Only data from the 25 women in higher education administration will be discussed in this paper. The women selected were contacted by phone to arrange an interview from one to two hours in length at their convenience.

An open-ended interview format was used to gather information concerning the career development of the women in the sample. Women were asked to describe their work history, discuss the role played by career in their life, factors which influenced their career decision-making, factors contributing to the establishment and maintenance of their careers, factors hindering their career development, whether they had considered changing careers, future career goals, whether they had or had had a career dream, and what their relationships with colleagues were like. (Questions related to family, suppoort systems, and self-concept were also asked but will not be discussed in this paper.)

Five female graduate students conducted the interviews. About 12 hours of training over a three week period was provided by the researcher to familiarize the interviewers with the type of information desired, to practice interview skills, and to review interview protocals. Each interviewer conducted a practice interview with an on-campus woman administrator, which

was critiqued prior to the beginning of the study.

Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed. The information obtained was content analyzed to answer the research questions posed earlier. Two raters unfamiliar with adult or career development theory separately analyzed each of the interviews, meeting to resolve differences. The researcher also reviewed the transcripts and ratings.

Results

Demographic Questionnaires

Of the 418 women administrators contacted, 270 (64%) returned the demographic questionnaire. Of these, 99 (36.7%) were higher education administrators. Considering only these 99 women in higher education administration, 45 (45.5%) were never married, 17 (17.2%) were married with no children, 25 (25.3%) were married with children, 11 (11.1%) were divorced or separated, and one woman was a widow. Seventeen (17.3%) were between 20 - 29, 30 (30.6%) were 30 - 39, 25 (25.5%) were 40 - 49, 16 (16.3%) were 50 - 59, and 10 (10.2%) were over 60. Twenty-eight (28.3%) held doctorates, 67 (67.7%) held masters, one held a law degree, and two held bachelors degrees.

Interview Sample

Characteristics of the interview sample are presented in Appendices A and B. Never married women, married women with children, and women between 20 - 29 were overrepresented. Married women with no children were underrepresented.

Interview Results - Total Sample

No one career pattern could be identified among the 24 women in the sample. Thirteen exhibited continuous work patterns, while 11 had been out of the work force at some point. Several began careers after raising children; a few began careers, then stopped out to raise children, resuming their careers when the children were in school. One young woman voluntarily left a position and was "stopping out" to reevaluate her career direction.

While 14 women had held only positions in higher education, 10 had worked in other fields as well, including secretarial positions, library work. business, and military service. Sometimes these positions were held prior to their employment in higher education. In other instances the women moved in and out of higher education.

Career plays a very important role in the lives of these women: 11 saw their careers as central to their identity while another 11 evaluated career of equal importance to other roles in their lives. Only two women saw other roles as more important and both indicated they still took their careers very seriously.

The decision to enter higher education administration was generally not well thought out. Often a student affairs professional or a professor suggested the psosibility and it seemed to match the individual's interests. The availability of jobs was a factor for 14 women and the opportunity for graduate assistantships was mentioned by several. Enjoyment of RA

positions or student activities was also a factor for many women.

The establishment and maintenance of careers were influenced by both internal and external factors. Motivation, ability, hard work, and self-esteem were both seen as important in the majority of careers evaluated. Family encouragement and support was important for many women. Twelve women indicated that colleagueal support was helpful. Fourteen women mentioned significant role models or mentors (both male and female) who had assisted in the development of their careers. Professional association membership and colleagues at other institutions were also significant in these women's careers. Thirteen women attributed their success to luck or "being in the right place at the right time."

Although five women could not identify any factors which had hindered their careers, others noted both internal and external influences. Lack of ambition or goals was mentioned by seven women; lack of a doctorate was also noted as a problem by seven women. Family circumstances, including a husband's job move or geographic limitations, held a number of women back. Seven women felt that they had been victims of sex discrimination, including "old boys networks", unwillingness to promote women, or failure to take women seriously.

A few women were definitely planning to leave higher education and several others were considering the possibility. Only one, however, was leaving because of a dislike for her work.

Others wished to investigate different experiences which might provide new challenges or felt a need to leave the field because of financial reasons or the lack of job opportunities.

A striking characteristic of the women in the sample was their lack of clear career goals; only one woman had specific plans for her future. As young women they had established only very general career dreams and most felt that these dreams had evolved as they pursued their careers. Because the dreams were so vague, it was difficult to determine if they had been realized.

Most women felt positive about their relationships with colleagues. About half of the woemen considered their colleagues to be close friends and socialized with them outside of work. Only one woman labeled her colleagueal relationships as negative.

Differences Related to Family Status

Never Married Women. Women who had never been married were somewhat more likely to have worked continuously and to have worked totally in higher education administration. Six of the eight single women viewed their career as central to their identity, often mentioning that since they weren't married, their energy went into their careers and it was difficult to carve out time for a personal life.

The unmarried women frequently mentioned the importance of colleagues in their careers. Their support systems generally revolved around colleagues in their present work setting and professional colleagues working at other institutions whom they

had met either in graduate school, in previous positions, or through professional associations. Single women also mentioned the importance of family support more frequently than other women.

Married Women Without Children. Since there were data available from only three women in this category, generalizations were difficult. The three women interviewed also exhibited great variety in their responses. All mentioned that their husbands were supportive of their careers yet they felt time conflicts between their careers and maintaining good relationships with their husbands.

Married Women With Children. Married women with children were more likely to have had discontinuous work patterns. Several did not work unitl their children were in school and five of the seven had worked in fields other than education. Many began working to contribute financially to their families but found after working for a time that their careers became very important to them. Five of the seven ranked their careers of equal importance with their families.

While all felt that their husbands were supportive of their careers, many mentioned that their husbands' career decisions (either to remain in a specific geographic location or to move) had hindered their own career development. The married women with children still at home noted role conflicts and some guilt feelings about not having enough time for their children.

Divorced or Separated. The six divorced women showed considerable variety in their life experiences. Three had worked continuously while three had at least begun raising children before embarking on their education and careers. Five of the six felt that their careers were an issue in their divorces. In each case, these women suggested that their husbands felt threatened by their career success or resentful that they had been asked to make geographic moves to further their wives' careers. While all the women viewed their divorces as traumatic, they did not feel that their work performance had visably suffered, in many cases because work served as a distraction and filled a void in their lives.

Differences Among Age Cohorts

Twenty - Twenty-nine Year Olds. As one would suspect, the young women in the sample exhibited continuous work patterns, although one had recently left a position to reevaluate her career direction. All eight of these women had worked totally in higher education settings. College experiences, encouragement from student affairs professionals, and job availability were major factors in the selection of careers in higher education. The young women were more likely to mention help and encouragement from their families as being important in the establishment and maintenance of their careers. They also identified mentors who had assisted in their career development.

Half of the 20 - 29 year olds saw their educational level as hindering their future career advancement and several were

considering doctorates. These women also mentioned sex discrimination as an inhibiting factor more frequently than all but the oldest women in the sample, noting that they were excluded from male networks, lacked access to information male colleagues received, and were not taken seriously as professionals. The young married women also mentioned that family responsibilities had conflicted with their career development.

Seven of the eight young women plan to stay in higher education but hope to move to other positions which will afford them more challenge, different experiences, or a better fit with family responsibilities. Their goals are quite general and they lack a clear career dream.

Thirty - Thirty-nine Year Olds. The four women in the 30 - 39 year old age group were still looking forward to career advancement or career changes that would offer different experiences, more challenges, and a more adequate salary. Two were from rather nontraditional backgrounds, a nurse working in student health and a lawyer working in women's affairs. Unlike the other two women in this age group, neither of these women anticipated staying in higher education settings.

Three of the four women had decided to enter higher education administration because jobs became available to them in this field. Their careers were helped by mentors and colleagues and none of the four noted any particular factors that had

hindered their careers.

Forty - Forty-nine Year Olds. The women between 40 and 49 showed a variety of work patterns: two had worked continuously while three had stopped out at various times because of an inability to find employment or to raise children. Two of the five had worked in clerical positions at some point and one had begun her career as a high school teacher. One gets the sense that these women drifted into their career choices; four of the five mention luck as a major factor in the establishment of their careers. Several of these women adjusted their career plans to fit their husbands' plans.

While they talk of future plans, ambivalence is evident in whether to move to other positions. Retirement was mentioned by one 44 year old woman as a factor to consider.

Fifty - Fifty-nine Year Olds. Three of the four women in this age group began careers after raising children. Two began taking classes and then moved into positions in higher education after completing degrees. Three had held positions in other areas prior to their moves into higher education. The one woman who had worked continuously in higher education had entered graduate school to study student affairs on the advice of a mentor and because she could obtain a graduate assistantship in the area. At the time she knew little about the field.

While these women value their careers, other roles are also important (family and/or friendship). The women seem to be

"slowing down". Possilble career changes have to do with post-retirement plans.

Sixty and Over. The depression was a decisive event in the career histories of these older women. They desired college educations but were held back because of lack of money. Two had to enter the work force after high school and took classes at night. Two entered fields they hadn't intended to pursue in oder to support themselves. All four worked outside of higher education at various points in their careers; movement in and out of higher education was a pattern for two women while two began in other fields and moved into higher education later. Strong motivation to obtain degrees and pursue careers was evident in the comments of these women. Three mentioned the assistance of colleagues as important in career development. Luck was also seen as a major factor. Three women felt that being women had limited their opportunities for advancement. All four women mentioned that their professional colleagues were also close friends they saw outside of work.

Two women were retired and the other two were actively planning their retirements. Community involvement and volunteer activities were important to these women. (One had been elected to public office!) They also mentioned that they enjoyed traveling and having more time for friends.

Discussion

Four questions guided this investigation and will be discussed in light of the results obtained. In a very general

sense life stages can be identified within the careers of professional women. The forties seem to be a turning point for many. Before this decade, women seem to be building careers and look forward to career advancement and positions offering new experiences and challenges. Women in their 50's and 60's, however, view their careers as more settled and are making plans for retirement. There is no clear pattern of career development beyond this general picture, however. Wide variety is seen in the work histories of these women. Some have worked continuously, others have moved in and out of careers, others have begun careers later in life.

To the extent that life stages can be identified, they seem to be more related to internal processes rather than external roles. How the woman views her career at various points in her life is a good deal more predictable than what she will actually be doing at any particular point.

Both external, sociological factors and internal, psychological factors influence women's career development. Marital and family roles are especially important in career development. Never married women were more likely to exhibit continuous work patterns and to center their lives around their careers. Married women, especially those with children, experience more role strain, find their careers influenced by career decisions their husbands make, and seem to have more varied work histories than single women. Their careers are

important to them but so are their family roles. Divorced women "look like" both groups. Until their divorces, they experience the same patterns and conflicts as married women; following their divorces their career paths and attitudes resemble those of the never married women.

The importance of role models, colleagues, and mentors in the career development of women is very evident in this study. Women enter higher education administration based on the advice of people in the field, look to colleagues for support, and frequently attribute their success to supervisors or mentors who guided them along the way.

Internal factors are also important, however. These women, for the most part, are highly motivated to succeed and attribute much of their success to hard work and ability. A number mentioned their lack of clear goals as an inhibiting factor in their career development.

There seems to be no clear pattern with regard to the importance played by career over the life course. Much depends on when the woman began her career. However, once careers have been established, they seem to paly a consistently important role in the women's lives. Even young women who are also beginning families view their careers as very important. Older women anticipating retirement are still actively involved in their work.

In addition to answering the specific questions posed in this study, the data raise several other interesting hypotheses.

The lack of plannig evident in the career histories of these women is somewhat disconcerting. Few women actively made decisions to enter higher education administration; many were offered positions or entered the field because they could think of no other alternatives. They had no clear career dream and only general goals for career advancement. Perhaps the failure of women to achieve top level positions is partially attributable to this lack of planning.

The influence of job market conditions on the career development of women is clearly evident in the data. A much more fluid job market and lack of affirmative action requirements allowed the older women to move in and out of positions and to take positions offered without formally applying for them. This type of flexibility is not evident in the careers of younger women and may force them to plan their careers more carefully.

Societal conditions, especially the depression and World War II, greatly influenced the career paths of these older women. we need to remember that often economic conditions and other historical influences affect careers in ways which cannot be controlled by the individual.

A particularly interesting finding is the role played by husbands in the career development of women. Although they note role conflict, all the married women indicate that their husbands are supportive of their careers. However, they also mention that geographical moves made for their husbands' careers or an inability to move because of their husbands' careers have

inhibited their own career development. The husbands seem to be supportive of their wives' careers as long as the women are making the compromises and they, themselves, are not called upon to alter their career plans. This hypothesis is reinforced when the career paths of the divorced women are investigated. These women believe that their career advancement was an important factor in their divorces. In many cases, they had asked their husbands to move, which the women believed contributed to their husbands' resentment. Their wives' career success was also seen as threatening to these men.

Another fasinating finding was related to perceived sex discrimination. The two groups that mentioned discrimination as a factor inhibiting their career development were the oldest women and the youngest women in the sample. Perhaps, the women over 60 were most involved in their careers at a time when discrimination was so obvious that its effects could not be denied. The youngest women, on the other hand, have grown up and entered the career world with a heightened feminist awareness of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors and may be more sensitive to such treatment than slightly older women.

Conclusions

This study is, of course, exploratory in nature. The sample size is small and the interview methodology necessitates interpretation that leaves room for bias. The results obtained raise more questions, perhaps, than they answer. Further studies

that focus on specific aspects of the career development of particular groups of women are a logical follow-up.

The lack of clear career paths and the necessity of flexibility in combining a number of roles are evident in the lives of professional women, however. At the same time, the job market in higher education appears to be tighter and the career path to senior level positions is becoming more rigid. Either women must adjust and become better planners or the field must adjust to accomodate more women. Higher education as a field needs to address this issue.

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APPENDIX A

Profile of Interview Participants

Participant	Title	Degree	Marital Status	Age
1	Residence Hall Director	M.A.	never married	28
2	Dean of Student Services	M.A.	never married	28
3	Coord., Off-Campus Housing Services/Counselor	M.S.	never married	27
4	Residence Hall Director	M.S.	never married	28
5	Dir of Honors & Young Scholars, Prof of History	Ph.D.	never married	44
6	Assoc. Dir. of Residence Life	M.S.	never married	58
7	Coord. for Residence Life	M.A.	never married	64
8	Dean of Students, Emerita	M.A.	never married	67
9	Counselor	M.S.	married, 1 child	29
10	Director of Student Health	B.S.N.	married, 2 children	35
11	Director of Marketing Services and Admissions	Ed.D.	married, 1 child	44
12	Vice Pres. for Student Life and Human Resources	M.A.	married, 3 children	57
13	Director of Student Counseling	Ed.D.	married, 7 children	50
14	Director of Professional Selection/Professor, Ed. Psych (retired)	Ph.D.	married, 4 children	63
15	Assoc. Dean of Student	M.S.	married, 3 children	66
16*	Counselor	M.Ed.	married, 0 children	26*
17	Coord. for Residence Life	M.S. M.Ed.	married, 0 children	28
18	Asst. Dean of Students	M.S.	married, 0 children	30
19	Asst. to the Dean of Arts and Letters	M.S.	married, 0 children	44
20	Asst. Dean of Students	M.A.	divorced, 0 children	25
21	Dean-Undergraduate Life	Ph.D.	divorced, 0 children	37
22	Director, Office of Women's Affairs	J.D.	separated, 1 child	36
23	Chairperson, Div. of Humanities and Social Sci./Assoc. Prof, History	Ph.D.	divorced, 1 child	48
24	Assoc. Dean of Faculties	Ph.D.	separated, 0 children	43
25	Coord., Freshmen Orientation and Registration	M.Ed.	divorced, 3 children	57

* not transcribed

APPENDIX B

Distribution of Interview Participants

Marital Status	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
Single	4	0	1	1	2	8
Married-No Children	2*	1	1	0	0	4
Married-No Children	1	1	1	2	2	7
Divorced or Separated	1	2	2	1	0	6
Total	8	4	5	4	4	25

* one transcript was unavailable for analysis.

Interview Questions

I. Career

1. Describe your work history.
2. What role does your career play in your life.
3. What factors contribued to your decision to enter this profession?
4. What factors have been important in the establishment and maintenance of your career?
5. Have any factors hindered the development of your career?
6. Have any factors been particularly helpful in the development of your career?
7. Have you ever changed or considered changing careers? What factors influenced your decision?
8. Where do you see yourself going in the future in relations to your career? What will you do to help it along?
9. Have you set a career dream for yourself or did you ever have such a dream? When did you become aware of this dream?
10. What are your relationships with your professional colleagues like?